

Renovation rescue package

With the number of alterations and additions on the slide in a cash-strapped economy, now may be the smartest and most cost-effective time to engage builders and architects for your dream overhaul

There are global financial concerns and figures suggest the renovation industry has taken a downturn. But that doesn't mean you need to shelve your home makeover. With careful planning and some sensible advice, you can make the situation work for you. For renovators considering adding to their mortgage, the best advice might be to look at ways to reduce costs without compromising on the finished product. Here, experts share their advice. ■

Robyn Willis

Angus Kell

Head of Archicentre NSW

- Develop a design master plan early so you can renovate in stages without wasting money pulling things out later. The first stage might be fixing up the kitchen or putting in a larger doorway. The next is a more substantial job, which might include structural work. Finally, add the finishing touches such as landscaping or a swimming pool.

- Avoid up-to-the-minute design trends that may be expensive to replace later, such as bathroom or kitchen tiles. If you want to use the latest colours, use paint that can be changed at minimum cost.

- Softening in the housing industry means a lot of architects, builders and tradespeople are looking for work so now is the time to act. When the market picks up, it will happen quickly and you might miss the boat.

- Considering being an owner/builder? Figures indicate you could expect to save less than 20 per cent of the overall cost without factoring in the time you take off your day job.



Brian Seidler

Executive director of the Master Builders Association of NSW

- Ask your architect if they can specify standard lengths and sizes for items such as windows, doors and plasterboard. It will be cheaper than having something custom made.

- Investigate the impact home automation might have on your energy bills. In some cases, it can increase fourfold.

- The materials and labour required to insulate your roof are minimal and can seriously reduce your ongoing energy consumption.



A Choose materials that will not date quickly. If you want to use the latest colours, paint can be changed as trends do

B Tradespeople are looking for work so now is the time to act



Harley Dale

Chief economist with the Housing Industry Association

- Do your homework up front when it comes to budget so that if you want to upgrade your surfaces or fittings, you know how much you are spending before a single brick is laid.

- NSW has recorded the greatest drop in renovations nationally, indicating that the cost of labour might be dropping. For those with finance, now could be a good time to call in the builders.

Adrian Zenere

Principal architect with Archizen Holistic Architecture

- Choose materials carefully. Even though granite lasts a lifetime, in the fashion stakes it passed its used-by date at the start of the new millennium.

- If your renovation is modest, consider staying at home while the work is done to eliminate the cost of moving and renting.



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